

MIKE CAUSEY

Beware of Classifiers

IF A HARD-EYED TYPE with a clipboard begins hanging around your desk, get busy. The salary and job you save may be your own.

Job classifiers with new-found clout are loose in government. They are trying to find out if people are being paid too much—or not enough—for what they are doing. What they are finding, to date, is painful to many employees. And the worst is yet to come. Most of the 347,000 civil servants here will be audited in the next year or so.

Past job or grade classification audits in government have been pretty much of a joke. A few people have been promoted, a few downgraded, but mostly the exercise meant nothing. Now things have changed.

Agencies, under orders from the White House, are actively checking for inflated jobs and are requiring line managers to bounce the incumbents back when overgrading is evident. Officials swear this is no witch-

throughout government are cracking and classifiers are getting tough.

For a small sampling of what is happening, or will happen, all over government, look what has just taken place at HEW's office of administration. About 220 jobs there were studied. The preliminary conclusion is that 48 of them are overgraded and overpaid. The same study found that 28 probably are undergraded and underpaid.

HEW officials say nobody has been downgraded yet as a result of this study, and that more negotiations with classifiers must take place before anything become final. But if that is happening in HEW, considered by many to be among the government's "grade creep" champs, imagine what will happen in other agencies when the long knives arrive.

JANUARY PENSION INCREASE?

It isn't official yet, but odds are good that the Washington area's 100,000 retired federal, postal and military aides will be getting a cost-of-living raise effective in January, payable in pension checks received in February.

The Consumer Price Index for the month of July hit 171.1. It must reach only 171.3 to trigger the three-month countdown leading to a cost-of-living adjustment for retirees or their survivors. If the next CPI hits or exceeds the 171.3 level and remains there for two consecutive months, retirees would come due for a raise in January and get it in February checks.

Bernie Zwinak has resigned his top staff job with the American Federation of Government Employees to campaign for the vice presidency of the big AFL-CIO union. AFGE delegates will vote to fill their three top national offices at their September convention in Las Vegas. Zwinak has served as administrative assistant to the last three AFGE presidents.

Pension Cut Plan: The House this week may take up legislation backed by the Ford administration that would eliminate the 1 per cent "kicker" from future pension increases of federal and military retirees. The bill by Rep. David Henderson (D-N.C.) would speed up cost-of-living raises to retirees, but would eliminate the 1 per cent bonus the government now adds to make up for that delay.

If it succeeds, future cost-of-living raises for retirees would be limited to the rate of inflation.

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hunt, but if grade inflation is as bad as they suspect, it will seem like one to many employees when the smoke has cleared.

It's part of President Ford's campaign to put an end to "grade creep," that phenomenon of both government bureaucracies and private business that can result in people being paid more than they are worth. The master plan that determines this, incidentally, is usually set by officials who are paid more than anybody else, and whose jobs for some reason are never downgraded.

The General Accounting Office last March said that a "significant," but not dominant, factor in the 600 per cent white-collar federal salary jump in the past 26 years has been grade creep. It peaked during the Kennedy-Johnson years, many experts believe, when new social action programs came into being. The accompanying empire-building that goes with many fledgling federal agencies was tolerated and encouraged.

There was a time, too, when federal salary adjustments were few and far between, when agencies permitted government workers to "puff" their own grades to give them hidden and overdue raises. That practice is out the window now, and agencies